

CLAIMS

1. A method of establishing an auditable record of the process of agreement of contract by multiple participants in a service which operates over a computer network and which has a customer and a vendor which negotiate during a contract formation phase of a transaction and in which a product or service is supplied to the customer during a contract execution phase of the transaction, the method including providing a contract manager which monitors communications between the parties relating at least to the contract formation phase of the transaction, the contract manager keeping an auditable record of the negotiation so as maintain an independent record of the agreed contract.
2. A method according to claim 1 wherein the contract manager maintains an auditable record of each step in the negotiation.
3. A method according to claim 2 wherein the contract manager maintains an auditable record of at least one of each new contract term proposed, and any change to a previously proposed contract term proposed, and a proposed contract term being agreed, so that the party to the negotiation who made an initial proposal or proposed a modification to a previously proposed contract term, may subsequently be identified.
4. A method according to claim 1 wherein the contract manager is operated independently of the customer and the vendor
5. A method according to claim 1 wherein the parties negotiate using a job ticket format with the job ticket being exchanged between the vendor and the buyer during the contract formation phase of the transaction while the parties make proposals and counter proposals for the contract terms.

6. A method according to claim 1 wherein in performance of the method the parties exchange a reference only to the contract being negotiated, along with any fresh proposal or proposal for a modification to any contract term.

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7. A method according to claim 1 wherein the contract manager, in addition to monitoring communications between the parties during the contract formation phase of the transaction, monitors communications between the parties relating to the contract execution phase of the transaction, the contract manager keeping an auditable record of such communications so as to maintain an independent record of such communications.

8. A method according to claim 1 wherein in the event that the parties agree to a change in the negotiated contract during the contract execution phase of the transaction, a record of such change is maintained by the contract manager along with an auditable record of which party proposed and which party agreed to such a change.

9. A method according to claim 1 wherein the contract manager is connected to the network and the contract manager generally passively monitors communications between the parties.

10. A method according to claim 1 wherein the contract manager is enabled by one or both or only upon agreement of the parties at an early stage in the contract formation negotiations prior to any contract terms being agreed to by the parties.

11. A service which operates over a computer network and which has a customer and a vendor which negotiate during a contract formation phase of a

transaction and in which a product or service is supplied to the customer during a contract execution phase of the transaction, the service including a contract manager which monitors communications between the parties relating at least to the contract formation phase of the transaction, the contract manager keeping  
5 an auditable record of the negotiation so as maintain an independent record of the agreed contract.

12. A contract manager for a service which operates over a computer network and which has a customer and a vendor which negotiate during a  
10 contract formation phase of a transaction and in which a product or service is supplied to the customer during a contract execution phase of the transaction, the contract manager in use, monitoring communications between the parties relating at least to the contract formation phase of the transaction, and the contract manager keeping an auditable record of the negotiation so as maintain  
15 an independent record of the agreed contract.